

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SEOUL 01809 180951Z

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8926

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 1809

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, KS

SUBJECT: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SESSION; CONTROVERSIAL NEW BILL
INTRODUCED

REF: (A) SEOUL 1625; (B) SEOUL 1769

SUMMARY: SPECIAL SESSION OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ENTERED
SECOND DAY WITH ROUTINE INTERPELLATION OF ROKG OFFICIALS
BY NDP AND OTHERS ON FAMILIAR OPPOSITION ISSUES. DRP
POLICY CHAIRMAN, HOWEVER, INTRODUCED BILL WHICH WOULD
SET SEVEN YEAR IMPRISONMENT PENALTY FOR ALL KOREANS
FOUND GUILTY OF CRITICIZING ROKG OUTSIDE COUNTRY AS WELL
AS FOR THOSE IN COUNTRY WHO CRITICIZE ROKG TO FOREIGNERS.
END SUMMARY.

1. ON MARCH 18, NDP MEMBERS CONTINUED THEIR PARTICIPATION
IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ACTIVITIES BY QUESTIONING ROKG
OFFICIALS (INCLUDING PRIMIN) ON SUCH SUBJECTS AS
ARREST OF KIM CHI HA, ALLEGED ROKG PRESSURE ON TONGA
ILBO ADVERTISERS, AND ALLEGED TORTURE OF EMERGENCY
MEASURE PRISONERS. NO NEW GROUND WAS BROKEN.
PRIMIN AND OTHERS MANAGED TO FIELD QUESTIONS WITHOUT
PROBLEM, DENYING KNOWLEDGE OF ALL BUT KIM CHI HA
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PAGE 02 SEOUL 01809 180951Z

QUESTION AND FINESSING THAT ONE BY NOTING THAT ARREST

WAS PROBABLY ALL IN ORDER (REFTEL B). NDP'S CHOE HYONG-U, WHO CLAIMS HE HIMSELF WAS TORTURED BY ROKG, CONDUCTED QUESTIONS ON TORTURE SUBJECT.

2. MOST CONTROVERSIAL AS WELL AS NEWSWORTHY EVENT OF SESSION SO FAR HAS BEEN INTRODUCTION OF BILL ON MARCH 18 BY DRP POLICY COMMITTEE HEAD, PAK CHUNG-KYU. IN ESSENCE BILL CALLS FOR CONFINEMENT FOR SEVEN YEARS AT HARD LABOR OF ANY KOREAN CITIZEN OUTSIDE THE BOUNDARIES OF THE COUNTRY WHO HAS OR MAY DEFAME ROKG BY DISTORTING FACTS OR SPREADING FALSE RUMORS ABOUT ITS GOVERNMENT OR INSTITUTIONS. COURTS MAY ALSO IMPOSE TEN YEARS LOSS OF CIVIL RIGHTS. FURTHERMORE, ANY PERSON WITHIN KOREA ITSELF WHO SO DEFAMES STATE IN CONVERSATIONS WITH FOREIGNERS OR "FOREIGN INSTITUTIONS" SHALL ALSO BE SUBJECT TO LAW.

3. ACCORDING TO TONGA ILBO, THIS LAW HAS BEEN DEvised TO PREVENT KOREAN CITIZENS FROM CRITICIZING KOREAN POLITICAL SCENE WITH FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS OR MISSIONARIES ETC. CHUNGANG ILBO SPECULATES THAT ANY POLITICIAN WHO CRITICIZES GOVERNMENT POLICY WITH A FOREIGN NEWSMAN WILL BE GUILTY OF AN ANTI-STATE CRIME. SOME OBSERVERS ARE CALLING PROPOSED LAW THE "KIM TAE-CHUNG OR KIM YONG-SAM LAW".

4. BILL WAS INTRODUCED TO PLENARY SESSION ON MARCH 18 AND IS EXPECTED TO GO TO JUDICIARY COMMITTEE FORTHWITH TO BE PASSED ON FLOOR BY MARCH 20, CLOSING DAY OF SPECIAL SESSION. JOINING WITH PAK CHUNG-KYU IN INTRODUCING BILL WAS DEPUTY POLICY COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN, KU TAE-HOE, A YUCHONGHOE MEMBER, AND AT LEAST EIGHTY DRP AND YUCHONGHOE ASSEMBLYMEN. (THERE ARE NOW 216 MEMBERS OF ASSEMBLY AND MAJORITY VOTE IS NEEDED TO PASS SUCH A BILL. THIS BILL WOULD BE AN AMENDMENT TO CURRENT CRIMINAL CODE ON SUBJECT OF DEFAMATION OF STATE.)

5. NDP SPOKESMEN SAID THEY WILL BLOCK PASSAGE OF SUCH A BILL "BY ALL MEANS AVAILABLE" THOUGH NO ONE HAS BENTURED TO SAY WHAT THEIR TACTICS WILL BE.
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PAGE 03 SEOUL 01809 180951Z

6. COMMENT: EMBASSY HAS NOT YET OBTAINED OFFICIAL TEXT OF BILL. AS OUTLINED IT APPEARS PRINCIPALLY AIMED AT CUTTING OFF FOREIGN NEWSMEN AND MISSIONARIES FROM CRITICAL SOURCES BUT IT ALSO HAS SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR EMBASSY AND OTHER OFFICIAL AMERICANS SUCH AS VISITING CONGRESSMEN. IT WILL FURTHER DAMAGE ROK INTERNATIONAL IMAGE IN GENERAL

AREA OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS. WE ARE DISPOSED
TO BRING THESE POINTS TO ATTENTION ROKG BEFORE BILL
BECOMES LAW BUT BELIEVE OUR APPROACH WOULD BE MORE
EFFECTIVE IF BASED ON INSTRUCTIONS. PLEASE ADVISE.
ERICSON

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